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ABSTRACT

Following nine hours of training in behavioral psychology, the faculty members of an 800 pupil elementary school were applying operant techniques with no further apparent need of consultation with the instructors. Twenty-two teachers were enrolled in an inservice training course entitled "Behavior Modification Procedures for the Elementary School Teacher." Teachers were shown color slides illustrating actual classroom use of operant conditioning procedures, were asked to count their own verbal praise for a twenty minute period each day during the course, and were required to prepare a transparency showing daily count of pinpointed child behavior the teacher was dealing with (hitting, talking spontaneously, leaving seat, thumbsucking, etc). As the sessions progressed, teachers began consulting and working together on group contingencies and children they instructed in common. Group discussions, positive attitudes among the teachers, visual representation of behavior change, increased praise of satisfactory behavior and teacher cooperation were the contributing factors to the success of the program. (JMB)

The Conversion of a Public Elemenatary School to a Reinforcement-Oriented Environment with 9 Hours of In-Service Training

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Abstract

Following nine hours of training in behavioral psychology the entire faculty of an 800 pupil public elementary school were applying operant techniques with no further apparent need of consultation with the instructors. Group discussions of behavior charts and self-counting of verbal praise appeared to be responsible for the success observed.

The authors were asked to provide in-service training for teachers in an elementary school on an experimental basis. This was the first time the district had offered such training in a single school for faculty of that school. In an austerity budget situation, administrators were concerned about offering a course that would have "results" and that could demonstrate effectiveness. The teachers in the school chose to receive training in the area of Behavior Modification from an offering of three or four proposed in-service courses.

Subjects

Twenty-two of the 27 classroom teachers at the 800 pupil Lime Kiln Elementary School, Spring Valley, New York were enrolled in an in-service training course entitled "Behavior Modification Procedures for the Elementary School Teacher". Verbal comments by the teachers at the first meeting indicated some apprehension about the efficacy and "legitimacy" of these techniques.

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Procedure

Eight two-hour weekly after-school meetings were scheduled. The school principal attended most sessions. All teachers enrolled were female and on the faculty of the school. The authors served as instructors for the course. Lateness, room scheduling problems, a bomb scare evacuation, and necissity of ending sessions approximately 15 minutes early due to teachers private schedules resulted in a total of 9 hours actual contact with the course instructors. The final meeting of the class was videotaped. During this meeting teachers discussed their data and overall impressions of the value of the procedures, and no instruction took place.

Each teacher was told to select her worst "problem" child to work with. The problem may have been behavioral or academic. The teachers own classroom served as her "laboratory" for the duration of the course.

Two critical aspects of the training sessions seemed to differentiate the present procedures from those already discussed in the literature. (e.g. Hall, 1971; Phillips, 1971; Scott, 1970; Sloane and Allan, 1968; Ulrich, et. al. 1968). First, the training sessions were richly illustrated by a collection of some 250 35mm color slides depicting the acutal classroom use of operant conditioning procedures. Slides were also used to show data from other schools and results reported in journal articles. A second important feature of the training was that all teachers were asked to count their own verbal praise for a 20 minute period each day during the course. A third feature of the class sessions which has been used in some in-service training such as that discussed by Hall (1971) but not in others, was the preparation by each teacher of a chart on an overhead transparency to be shown to the entire group. This chart showed the daily count of pinpointed behavior the teacher was dealing with and the teachers own daily count of her verbal praise. Teachers were asked to increase their verbal praise to a rate of about once every two minutes.

During the first session teachers were taught to pinpoint behaviors objectively and count and record these behaviors on their charts. The session included actual practice in verbally pinpointing behaviors and counting them. During the second and subsequent sessions each teacher present showed her chart and discussed her progress for 2 to 4 minutes. Following presentation of baseline data the instructors made recommendations of certain procedures That might be tried. In each case, existing data was used to show that such a procedure had worked elsewhere and when appropriate slides were shown depicting the use of such a procedure. In most cases praising appropriate behavior and ignoring inappropriate behavior was the first technique suggested. Teachers were praised for their charting behavior. The group discussion of their individual data resulted in attention being given to them for their charting behavior. From the third session on other teachers were encouraged to make suggestions as to procedures which might be used.

Results

Among the pinpointed behaviors chosen by the teachers to work on were: hitting; out of seat; following instructions; starting and completing class assignments; completing homework; talking spontaneously; accuracy in arithmetic; thumbsucking; group talkout; spelling accuracy; reading speed and comprehension as measured by standard test; and wearing glasses.

By the third training session most teachers had successfully changed a behavior in the desired direction. Those that were not satisfied with their progress received additional suggestions from the instructors and other teachers. The teachers became conversant with such terms and phrases as "time out", "group-contingency", "response-cost", and "reinforcement-menu". They used these terms accurately in consulting with other teachers. By the third and fourth sessions many teachers began to work together on group contingencies and children that they instructed in common. By the fourth session many teachers began to work together on group contingencies and children that

they instructed in common. By the fourth session the instructors were presented with charts which represented behavior change projects which were begun and successfully completed without specific consultation with the instructors. Most teachers pronounced their "worst" child no longer a problem. All teachers began working with other students and most with their entire class using group contingencies. The school special education teacher and remedial reading teacher both begain successfully employing behavior modification techniques. Literally hundreds of children began praising one another and the teacher for good behaviors. Several parents wrote or visited the school to inquire about the "secret formula" the teachers were employing. One parent wrote a letter to the administration complaining that another school where one of her children attended ha not yet applied these techniques. At least 8 teachers begain acting as consultants to parents in applying behavioral principles at home. Essentially the school had totally adopted the "theme song" of the in-service course which was "Accentuate the Positive". All faculty members not enrolled in the course began using the techniques based on information from enrolled teachers. Several teachers have been successful in training teachers in other schools in the district to pinpoint and chart behaviors. Other school principals and representatives of the central administration have expressed interest in having similar training for their faculty.

Implications and Conclusions

The success of this program may be attributed to several factors.

1. The group discussions of individual data may have supported pinpointing, counting and charting behavior as well as the visual representation of the behavior change.

2. The teacher's count of her own verbal praise and instructions to increase this to the level of .5 per minute provided a concrete goal for all teachers to work towards. Teachers reported that knowledge of forthcoming group discussion and also praise from others, helped them to increase their

own verbal praise.

3. The fact that most of the teachers from a single school were working together seems to be a significant factor. Bijou (1970) has pointed out the need for everyone in the school to speak the same language and help one another. The teachers reinforced one another throughout the week for their progress and achievements. This resulted in less dependency on the instructors for maintaining the application of the techniques.

4. The 35mm slides depicting classroom situations served as models after which teachers could pattern their own behaviors.

5. Of course one final reason for the success of the application of behavioral principles in the classrooms at Lime Kiln School may be paraphrased from Skinner (1966)..."It works".

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